

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF CONSERVATION:

The National Wildlife Refuge System

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(fifth in a 5-part series)

On March 14, 2003, the National Wildlife Refuge System will be 100 years old. Over the past five months, a monthly column has appeared on these pages with facts and figures about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System. This is the final column in a five-part series about the National Wildlife Refuge System. Following the column is a quiz about the Refuge System whose answers have been provided in the monthly columns. Cut out the quiz, fill it out, and bring it to our Centennial Celebration on March 14, 2003 at the Holiday Inn, Detroit Lakes. Completed quizzes that are brought to the March 14, celebration will be put in a bin and a drawing conducted. The first quiz drawn that has all of the correct answers, will receive a very special prize. Joe Hautman, two-time Federal Duck Stamp contest winner, has donated a signed and numbered print of his winning 2002-2003 duck stamp. Joe will be present in Detroit Lakes on March 14, to remark the print and personally present it to the winner. Carlee's Landing of Detroit Lakes is donating the framing for the print. Please take the quiz and join us on March 14, at the Holiday Inn from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System. **The drawing for the Hautman print will be conducted at 8:30 p.m. You must be present at that time to be eligible to win the Hautman print.** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees and their immediate families are not eligible to win the Hautman print. If you need assistance with your quiz, please visit our website where you will find the entire series of Centennial articles. Go to <http://midwest.fws.gov> click on Minnesota on the map and again on Detroit Lakes WMD.

Our Wildlife Legacy

The National Wildlife Refuge System began with a vision of our then President, Theodore Roosevelt. A vision that a system of lands across our great nation should be conserved for the habitat they provide and for the wildlife that depends on that habitat. It began with a promise of sorts; a promise to preserve wildlife and habitat for its own sake and for the benefit of the American people. Since that first declaration in 1903, the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown to include over 95 million acres in all 50 United States. A System has been created that is unlike any other system of conservation in the world; a system that is uniquely American.

Our American heritage is inextricably linked with our Nation's bountiful natural resources. We, as a nation, were blessed with abundant forests; vast plains with deep, rich soils; clean, pure rivers and lakes; and an incredible diversity of fish and wildlife. It is indeed through this blessing of abundance that America has thrived. We, as Americans, have long recognized the values of these wild places and abundant wildlife populations. In 1868, a generation before Teddy Roosevelt, President Ulysses S. Grant took action to protect the Pribilof Islands in Alaska. The Pribilofs were important habitat for the northern fur seal, and the seals were an extremely important economic resource in that day. In 1872, Yellowstone National Park was set aside. In 1881, President Benjamin Harrison issued an Executive Order to create the Afognak Island and Fish Culture Reserve, again in Alaska.

Since the time of these earliest efforts, we, the American people, have designated special places through all levels of our government. Through the federal government we have established the National Forest system and a network of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that provide for "multiple uses." Recreation, mineral extraction, grazing, and timber harvest may all be allowable uses benefitting society at large. National Parks are set aside to

preserve some of our Nation's scenic treasures to be enjoyed by the public: the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Yosemite. Our National Wildlife Refuges are set aside for wildlife; echoing that first promise to preserve wildlife and habitat for its own sake and for the benefit of the American people. At the State level, lands are recognized and deemed worthy of protecting their economic and intrinsic values as well. We have state forests, state parks, and state wildlife management areas, in a system similar to that of our Nation's government. Even at local levels of government, we, the citizens of the United States, continue to deem wild places and open spaces worthy of our collective protection. Cities and towns, large and small, have parks and natural areas alike set aside for our collective benefit as residents of these United States.

So, as we celebrate the Centennial of our National Wildlife Refuge System, I urge you to reflect on our Nation's wildlife legacy. I also challenge you to visualize the landscape in 2103. Will there be a Bi-Centennial for our National Wildlife Refuge System? Will our grandchildren, great grandchildren, and their children celebrate our successes? Will they be proud of our vision and our accomplishments? Will they know and value this Nation's wildlife legacy? Will they understand this Nation's heritage and the link between prosperity and abundant natural resources? They will if we continue, as a society, to value this legacy ourselves.

Do not simply leave this effort to the "government," at any level. Instead, make sure that we strive ourselves to insure this heritage and these special places are still valued and available for the future generations. For indeed we are all the "government," for we are Americans, and we charged ourselves with this duty more than 100 years ago.